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PERCEIVING SUBJECT AND SOCIAL COGNITION. REMARKS FROM ADOLF REINACH, SHAUN GALLAGHER AND DAN ZAHAVI

abstract

This paper deals with what Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi call “the social cognition” from the chapter How we know others in their book The Phenomenological Mind (Gallagher, Zahavi 2008), and what Adolf Reinach calls the “extraneous perception” in his university course Einleitung in die Philosophie (Reinach 1913) – that is, the possibility of intersubjectivity, according to these authors. My objective is to show how Gallagher and Zahavi’s analyses could profit from that of Reinach. I find that Reinach’s study could provide a particular heuristic value to Gallagher and Zahavi’s work, by furnishing it with a useful tool to clear up some issues which, in my opinion, remain rather vague. The first part of this article is devoted to outlining Gallagher and Zahavi’s thesis about how we know others, clarifying which points of their analyses could be cleared up by Reinach’s study; the second part presents Reinach’s arguments concerning the perception of the other subject; and finally, I will explain how Reinach’s analysis contributes to that of Gallagher and Zahavi’s work and remark on what accessing to others’ mental state from the second-person perspective by combining the two positions means.

keywords

Phenomenology; philosophy of mind; intersubjectivity; perception

1.
Deepen
“How we know
others”

Gallagher and Zahavi's *The Phenomenological Mind* is a very interesting effort to outline the most important topics concerning the philosophy of mind, cognitive science and phenomenology. According to the authors, cognitive science and philosophy of mind require comparing their interpretation of neural, sub-personal processes to their phenomenological and experiential face, as “we will not get very far in giving a scientific account of the relationship between consciousness and the brain unless we have a clear conception of what it is that we are trying to relate to” (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, p. 9). On this point, they state that the phenomenological analysis allows for understanding the neurological data in agreement with the correspondent experiences. The authors then set a problem of “access” – the object (experience, psychological state) is the same, but the access to it is different, and only an access to the experience from the first-person perspective (direct) can guarantee the right interpretation of data which comes from an access to the experience from a third-person perspective. Therefore, the claim of Gallagher and Zahavi is to show that “these phenomenological-based theoretical accounts and descriptions can complement and inform ongoing work in the cognitive sciences” (*ibid.*, p. 10). Each chapter of Gallagher and Zahavi's textbook is focused on a particular theme. In this article I will outline the 9th chapter of their book, *How we know others*, and I will attempt to link Reinach's analysis to the former's work. The chapter *How we know others* (*ibid.*, pp. 171-256) deals with the problem of access to the others' experiences from the second-person perspective. We could divide it into three parts: a first part, in which Gallagher and Zahavi provide an interpretation of social cognition using neurological data; then, a phenomenological part, devoted to reinforcing their interpretation on this aspect of one's experience; and finally, a part where they deal with intersubjectivity from a genetic, pragmatic and socio-cultural standpoint. I will focus on this third part here.

After having interpreted neurological data about social cognition as a particular kind of perception (*empathy*), refusing any theory-theory of mind and simulation theory of mind, Gallagher and Zahavi pose the question – “how can we explain the abilities that we have for our direct perception of the intentions and meanings of the others?” (*ibid.*, p. 187). Gallagher and Zahavi identify three intersubjective capabilities which appear at different moments in the development of the child: primary intersubjectivity (*corresponding to empathy*), which enables a person to grasp the lived body

and expressions; secondary intersubjectivity, which is the ability to perceive other phenomena of expression in pragmatic contexts; and narrative competency, which allows to comprehend other's "attitudes and responses as whole situated persons" (*ibid.*, p. 194) and requires a cultural and social dimension.

Gallagher and Zahavi state that empathy is not enough to result in an inclusive theory of social cognition. Empathy constitutes the basis of access to others, but it cannot entirely justify social cognition.

Gallagher and Zahavi describe primary intersubjectivity as follows:

From early infancy, humans [...] have capabilities for an interaction with others that [...] are precisely the capacities [...] to directly perceive the intentions and meanings of others. [...] Infants [...] are able to see bodily movement as goal-directed intentional movement, and to perceive other persons as agents. [...] The infant follows the other person's [...] body movements as meaningful, goal-directed movements (ibid., p. 188).

Gallagher and Zahavi, then, present the secondary intersubjectivity:

Our understanding of the actions of others is guided by the most relevant pragmatic (intentional, goal-oriented) level [...], we see actions as meaningful in the context of the physical and inter-subjective environment. If, in the vicinity of a loose board, I see you reach for a hammer and nail, I know what your intentions are as much from the hammer, nail, and loose board as from anything that I observe about your bodily expression or postulate in your mind. We interpret the actions of others in terms of their goals and intentions set in contextualized situations [...]. [...] Our perception of the other persons, as another agent, is [...] of an agent in a pragmatic context that throws light on the intentions (or possible intentions) of that agent (ibid., p. 190).

Thus, empathy gains access to the other mind, and it is able to "see bodily movement as goal-directed intentional movement, and to perceive other persons as agents", however it is not enough to be able to throw "light on the intentions (or possible intentions) of that agent". Here, we must comprehend the pragmatic context.

The question I would ask concerns what does one grasp by empathy if one also needs a pragmatic context in order to "interpret the action of the others in terms of their goals and intentions".

Gallagher and Zahavi show "the asymmetry between the first-person and the second- (and third-) person access to psychological states" (*ibid.*, p. 185), it being clear that "we never have direct access to another person's mind"

(*ibid.*, p. 182). They explain that indirect access doesn't imply more or less certainty in perceiving others' mental states, but only a constitutive difference to be respected and maintained. Nevertheless, I find their analysis vague in clarifying what one experiences when one accesses experiences from the second-person perspective. I will attempt to show how Reinach's analysis could be reactivated here in order to clarify this point.

2.
Adolf Reinach's
phenomenological
analysis about how
we "perceive" others

During his university course *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Reinach 1913, pp. 369-512), held in the summer semester of 1913, Adolf Reinach discussed the fundamental phenomenological problems and then, dealt with how the subject grasps "extraneous psychical experiences" (*ibid.*, p. 389) – how one accesses others' psychological states.

Concerning my article, this means that Reinach only deals with the first step of a theory of intersubjectivity and stops at the threshold of the second one. We should note that Reinach and Gallagher and Zahavi use different words to denote the same phenomenon – Reinach speaks of "I" (or "subject"), "extraneous psychical experience" and "perception", while Gallagher and Zahavi speak of "person", and "first and second person". I will mainly use Gallagher and Zahavi's lexicon. Furthermore, I will only focus on a part of Reinach's highly detailed analysis – the answer to "the question about the structure of the act, namely, extraneous perception analysis" (*ibid.*, p. 390).

According to Reinach, the analysis of the perception of extraneous psychical experience shows that:

- a. "The extraneous experience has its self-appearance" (*ibid.*, p. 391);
- b. "It does not need feelings of sympathy to be present for my part" (*ibid.*);
- c. "Extraneous experiences cannot be grasped as directly as one's own experiences" (*ibid.*).

To understand point a., one has to consider the pages devoted by Reinach to "the philosophical problematic of the external perception" (*ibid.*, pp. 372-382) in his course. In these, we find a clear treatment of the differences between the intentionally represented object and the intentionally perceived object, which can be the same, however, the former cannot appear on its own, while the perceptual object can:

*We follow the transition from representation to perception. The represented [das Vergegenwärtigte] is supposed to be real and offers itself to me on its own in perception. This self-appearance is essential. 1. Self-appearance has to be sharply separated from the features of the object concerned. 2. Self-appearance is also not to be confused with liveliness or difference of intensity. 3. Self-appearance must also be separated from the existence of the object in any sense [...]. 4. Self-appearance has no degrees. There is no more or less self-appearance. [...] Self-givenness is something that comes last, not to analyze further (*ibid.*, pp. 374-375).*

The first difference between these two intentional experiences lies in the way of givenness of certain phenomena – perception gives phenomena which appear by themselves, whereas, representation gives phenomena through a further mental operation which set them before the subject. Representing phenomena, therefore, means grasping them mediately, while perceiving them means grasping them immediately. The self-appearance of a phenomena means: these phenomena appear as such, e.g., they cannot be decomposed into something else; on *their* own, e.g. without any representation; and as “something last”, because one cannot further analyze them without altering them as *those* phenomena.

Therefore, point a. of Reinach’s analysis of extraneous perception implies one really perceives extraneous experiences and does not grasp a body in order to imagine a psychical life in it afterwards. If one person perceived sadness in someone, it would not represent it in a body, but it would perceive someone’s actual sadness as such.

For b., it suffices to observe that extraneous experiences need not be transmitted to the subject in order to be perceived. At first, one person grasps sadness in someone else, but she doesn’t feel its sadness consecutively. In point c., the most important one, Reinach shows how one person accesses others’ experiences. By observation “extraneous experiences cannot be grasped as directly as one’s own experiences”, Reinach means extraneous experiences are directly grasped, but in a different way from one’s own experiences. In order to correctly understand what Reinach suggests here, it is opportune to quote the whole passage at issue:

The opposition between extraneousness and ownership of the experiences is here exchanged with the opposition between the mediateness [Mittelbarkeit] and immediateness [Unmittelbarkeit] of their grasp. I grasp the extraneous sadness through something (gestures and the like), but like a self-given. The extraneous experience appears in something other, through something other- indirect self-appearance, mediated through physical. But there is no inference here (ibid., p. 392).

Most likely, “ownership” points to what “the I” belongs to, the “I-affiliation” (ibid., p. 382), then its own experiences; the extraneous ones are denoted by the “extraneousness”; “mediateness” and “immediateness” probably mean the way of grasping.

In order to understand whether the perceiving subject grasps extraneous experiences mediately or not, Reinach emphasizes an “exchange” between the first two terms and the second one. The perceiving subject grasps extraneous sadness *mediately*, but does not mediate extraneous sadness appearance, that is, it does not represent the extraneous sadness. The

other person's sadness is given through gestures (mediately), *but* also self-appears in them. Reinach's example shows that the extraneous sadness does not appear as if it were represented (mediately) by the subject to whom it appears, but rather self-appears in the extraneous body gestures (mediately). In fact, "there is no inference", no "mediateness [...]" of their grasp" – no mental operation, which adds something to a simple perception. Extraneous experience self-appears as such, by itself, but (one could say) *not* "in" itself, namely, indirectly, so that one perceives the extraneous body shining through the extraneous sadness. Moreover, Reinach tries to further clarify the experience of the access to another person. He does this by recounting a gripping analogy:

The case of the indirect givenness of extraneous experiences can be [...] compared to the grasp of meaning by (and through) hearing words [...]. Perhaps with a foreign language, words and meaning are two different things, not in one's own language. Here, words also appear to us as grounds [Anhaltspunkte], but I do not comprehend them as such, rather, I am directly wrapped up in their meaning [gehe direkt in ihrer Bedeutung auf]. We have a 'symbol-appearance' in both cases: through the word the meaning is grasped. But through direct pointedness to meaning, there is no sense in distinguishing between self-appearance and alien-appearance [Fremderscheinung] (symbol-appearance), as also through extraneous experiences (ibid., p. 392).

Reinach shows that extraneous experiences self-appear, as well as a meaning, and that the perceiving subject grasps them as meaningful in a meaningful body. The extraneous body, as well as a word, expresses extraneous experiences as well as a meaning.

One person accesses the extraneous experiences if, and only if, they perceive symbols, that is, something different from the "psychical" – the "physical". This kind of perception is then a peculiar one because of the indirect appearance of its object.

Reinach's analogy refers as much to two different kinds of objects, as to two completely different experiences – perception and understanding hearing (*Vernehmen*)¹: The first directly aims at given objects, while the second aims at them by receptively taking in meanings, which are only given by expression. The first requires the self-appearance of the object and can be intuitively fulfilled, while the second requires no intuition-based presence of the object. Using this analogy, Reinach points to the way of the

¹ In order to better understand this kind of act Cfr., Adolf Reinach 1911, pp. 315-376, especially p. 373, n. 11.

givenness of these intentional objects – both self-appear by alien-appearing. Phenomenologically, the extraneous gestures are symbols (grounds) which allow something else to appear. When one perceives someone's experience, one grasps his experience without representing what is taking place by his gestures. According to Reinach, then, the extraneous psychical experience appears as such and on its own, however "*in the flesh*" (reversing the actual meaning of the phrase), because one could only gain access to it through something physical.

Therefore, "being-wrapped-up-in" the extraneous experiences can only happen through its body. It implies no emotional involvement, but rather, it describes how a person intentionally grasps others' experiences. The "being-wrapped-up-in" clarifies that a person perceives, *at first*, its object as a subject, and *only then*, can she perceive the body as if it were lacking in psychical life. As well, one grasps the meaning in the word before grasping the phonetic complex.

In Reinach's phenomenological analysis, eventually, symbol (either words or gestures) appearance "disappears" "behind" what they give (either meanings or experiences), when one's intentionality is aimed at the last ones. Besides intentionality, what allows the extraneous psychical experience to appear is the extraneous body itself. Therefore, the extraneous body is not experienced as a normal body, but as a peculiar one, which, following Reinach's analogy, lets something meaningful (alien)appear: a psychical life.

In his analysis, Reinach doesn't further stress what the alien-appearance of other's experience implies. He concludes only stating that:

Even though we cannot see experiences (as well as a human being has never heard a meaning, but has grasped it through words), then extraneous experiences are directly grasped through physical expression-appearance (symbolic self-appearance of extraneous experiences). So, we actually comprehend [auffassen] extraneous states which we had no representation of before (ibid., p. 392).

3. Experience and second-person perspective

I find that Reinach's phenomenological analysis and that of Gallagher and Zahavi's could, taken together, be much more meaningful regarding the passage from primary to secondary intersubjectivity.

According to Reinach extraneous experiences self-appear by alien-appearing. Gallagher and Zahavi assume that one person grasps the other experience from the second-person perspective. By putting both of the descriptions together, one could say that extraneous experience self-appears from the second-person perspective by alien-appearing. This "confusion" shows the phenomenological difference in the structure of the appearance of the

extraneous experience. Therefore, one might say that the appearance of the other persons' experience is "forbidden" because one cannot access it in the first-person perspective, however, it is also "exposed" because experiences shine through a body and one can perceive them.

I would like to go deeper into what this "forbidden exposition" allows access to and Reinach's example of sadness and his analogy between meaning and extraneous experiences will lead my concluding arguments.

In agreement with Reinach's definition of intentionality, as "the relation of the experience [...] to any object" (*ibid.*, p. 383), and with that of experience as "experience the content" (*ibid.*, p. 393), Reinach speaks about the "*über*" (*ibid.*, p. 383) of the sadness, which points to what sadness is aiming at (its content). By feeling sadness, then, one aims at something (this feeling content) which is felt as sad. Reinach's theory of meaning presents the same structure (Reinach 1913, pp. 419-421). By saying "sadness", one aims at this feeling, by experiencing the meaning "sadness", as content of this experience; one only grasps its object and the correlative content by a given expression; the grasp happens without any intuition of the aimed object. By perceiving extraneous sadness, one grasps it intuitively, but one cannot grasp "further features" together with its sadness – what its sadness aims at is not given. In fact, either one already knows something about it or one has to ask to know about it. "The I" perceives an experience which self-appears without showing its content directly as well as, by saying "sadness", one is blind regarding what he's referring to – in both cases there is a lack of intuition.

Consequently, even if "the I" perceived the other person's intentional object and actually grasped her experience, it would not grasp the experience "content" – that is, the other person's experiences self-appearance does not allow *their* intentional relation to an object to appear by symbols. An experience without experience, if experience means "experience of the content", or better, an experience which accesses the psychological states from the second-person perspective. This is the actual difference between the first-person and the second-person perspective. One can grasp symbols which have meanings, but these meanings have no intuitive relations to their objects, therefore, one needs to grasp the meaningful expressions of the extraneous experiences in a particular, pragmatic context.

The "forbidden exposition" describes the access to others' experience in terms of appearance of experience without the content experienced. Then, by saying extraneous experiences self-appear by alien-appearing one understands why one needs to develop pragmatic abilities in order to actually know others' expressions and actions.

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